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Rancho Cielo Value Added Program Evaluation

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Abstract

Rancho Cielo Youth Campus is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization located in Salinas CA. The agency serves underserved and disconnected youth that have dropped out of school, are on probation, or under truancy regulations in Monterey County. The problem this capstone addressed is that the recidivism rate for at-risk youth is too high. Rancho Cielo's Value-added program seeks to alleviate this problem by training youth in agriculture technology as a way to connect them with careers in the sector. The capstone project consisted of a program evaluation that documented the program implementation and the creation of a program logic model. The expected outcome was to identify areas of improvement and areas of success pertaining to the implementation of the values added program. The recommendation is to continue to assess and document the program's implementation in preparation for an outcomes evaluation that measures the program's impact on the population served.

Keywords: *at-risk youth, Value-added program, program evaluation, logic mode*

I. Agency Description

Rancho Cielo Youth Campus is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization located in Salinas, serving Monterey county. The organization was established in the year 2000 and aimed to serve the underserved and disconnected youth of Monterey County, providing a comprehensive learning and social services center. The “underserved and disconnected youth” are young adults that have dropped out of school, are on probation, or under truancy regulations. Rancho Cielo’s mission statement states that the agency is established “To transform the lives of at-risk youth and empower them to become accountable, competent, productive and responsible citizens. Combining the rich resources of the natural landscape with the creative partnerships forged between local community, educational and law enforcement agencies, we aim to enrich the lives of young people who walk through our gates” (Rancho Cielo,2019).

As part of the support services for youth they offer transitional housing, mental health services, drug & alcohol counseling, amongst family counseling and career planning. The organization contains various programs including the Silver star youth program, Drummond Culinary Academy, Rancho Cielo Youth Corps, Rancho Cielo Construction Academy, and Ted Taylor Agricultural Vocational Center. In addition to these services Rancho Cielo offers the Value-Added Program. The Value-Added Program is under the Ted Taylor Vocational Center run by the agency, where students are offered training for highly skilled, living wage jobs that will serve the agriculture industry in Monterey County (Rancho Cielo, 2019). The program also

functions with a partnership with John Muir Charter School where students can earn the necessary credits to obtain a high-school diploma (Szydlowski, 2019). To obtain the necessary training students can also take courses through Hartnell College, where they will learn how to fix and maintain agriculture technology (Szydlowski, 2019).

II. Communities Served by the Agency

Rancho cielo youth corps serves the underserved and disconnected youth within Monterey county. The underserved and disconnected youth is also known as at risk youth. The terminology for at risk youth is composed of a child or adolescent who has a future with less optimal outcomes (National Center for School Engagement). All programs allocate the same resource for potential intakes.

Rancho Cielo Youth Corps serves a student population that consists of 65% males and 35% females. The program allocates its services to all ethnic groups, the ethnic group with the most representation are Hispanics at 77%, followed by 11% White/ Caucasian, 5% African American, 1% Asian, 1% Native American, and 1% other Ethnicities. The statistical data provided by Rancho Cielo Youth Corps enables the community to view the diversity within the campus and how all ethnicities benefit from the programs.

Students receiving services are immensely affected with a low socioeconomic status. According to Rancho Cielo (2016) Across all 5 programs at Rancho Cielo, participant income shows that nearly 70% of students fall in the Federal HUD category of very low income – at poverty level and 25% fall in the low- income – below a self sufficient standard. Going in hand

with socioeconomic status there are students who are homeless and live within the campus.

There is no statistical data that shows the exact number of homeless students within the program.

It is also important to be aware that most students have probation and/ or drop out students.

III. Problem Description

The problem this capstone will address is that the recidivism rate for at-risk youth is too high. At risk youth recidivism rates within Monterey county are high due to many factors including poverty, family dysfunctionally/instability amongst other characteristics. According to the “National Center for School Engagement” the term at risk-youth implies a future with less than optimal outcomes. There are many underlying factors that relate youth to being at risk, these include: homelessness, abuse, neglect, drug abuse amongst others.

In order to better understand the recidivism rate for at risk youth within Monterey county one must account for the contributing factors that play a role. The macro problem tied to the recidivism at risk youth rates come from poverty, family instability and dysfunction, as well as adverse childhood experiences which cause trauma. These factors have a direct impact on clients as well as the community and agencies. Dealing with such adversities leads the affected population to be affected by poor academic achievement, poor life decision making. Agencies are affected in the aspect of having increased clients rate with the same adversity problems and targeting certain consequences. For instance Rancho Cielo Youth Corps provides it services to individuals affected with school drop out, homelessness, amongst other factors.

According to the last decennial census, Monterey county had a total population of 415,057 of which 10.5% of families with children below the age of 18 fall under the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2010). Poverty affects youth in various ways for instance it can cause affected individuals to refrain from scholar activities. Consequences of poverty in the youth correlate to poor academic achievement and drop out. “One reason many students seem unmotivated is because of lack of hope and optimism. Low socioeconomic status and the accompanying financial hardships are correlated with depressive symptoms” (Jensen, E., 2013, p 25). The thought of being financially unstable takes a toll on the academic motivation these students have which can lead to dropping out of the education system. Both poverty and poor academic achievement/ drop out are subsequent contributing factors and consequences for one another. If an individual is to drop out of school they tend to have a low wage job which will continue the poverty cycle. Poverty plays a big role in the attainment and motivation taken in education.

Another contributing factor to the recidivism rate of at-risk youth involves adverse childhood experiences that correlate with family instability and dysfunction. Both of these contributing factors can lead to the consequences of abuse, neglect, and behavioral/ socioemotional problems. In a study conducted to measure the relation between adverse experiences and adolescent behavioral health problems it was found that the presence of parental domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, criminal justice involvement, child abuse and/or neglect, homelessness, and death of a biological parent, were reflected on poor behavioral

outcomes (Alice et al., 2015). This shows how drastic events as such affect the behavioral composure of adolescents enduring any of the probable causes. Being affected by any sort of negligence can determine how adolescents react emotionally to events and the attitude they have towards society. Figure 1 presents the problem model discussed in this section.

Figure 1: Problem Model

Causes/Contributing Factors	Problem statement	Consequences
Family instability and dysfunction.	Recidivism for at-risk youth is too high	Persistent Poverty
Poverty		Poor academic achievement, drop out
Lack of programs and interventions that assist youth		Continuing involvement in the criminal system as adults

Project Connection with the Problem:

At risk youth face high recidivism and a high probability of ending in the criminal system as adults. Rancho Cielo's goal is to break the cycle of recidivism by providing at risk youth with programs that allow them to live productive lives. It is crucial that all the programs offered are maximizing the agency resources and the benefit they can provide to the youth. My capstone consisted in the process evaluation of Rancho Cielo's Value added Program. The evaluation goal is to establish if the program was implemented as intended so that the agency can make changes and improve the program.

IV. Capstone Project Description and Justification

The capstone project consisted of a process evaluation on Rancho Cielo's Value-Added Program. This program facilitates high school education for young adults between the ages 16-24 and falls into the categories of high school dropout, probation, and/or truancy regulations. Through John Muir Charter school students obtain the necessary credits to acquire a high-school diploma and at the same time learn the necessary skills for agricultural technology. The program length and completion time are framed to be ten months long. This evaluation took a closer look at the program implementation by documenting the completion times of current and past participants, the creation of a logic model, and identification of areas of improvement within the value-added program.

In order to obtain the adequate data and information regarding the long term outcomes of the program I created a logic model for this specific program. Essentially a logic model is a description of the causes and effects that lead to an outcome. A logic model establishes the necessary steps to have an impactful and successful outcome towards the agency's desired long-term goals. In order to create this logical model I reached out to other program coordinators to obtain their logic model and gain a sense on how to create one specifically for the value-added program. Composing the logic model made it clear onto what the program specifics were and what steps are being taken to obtain the desired outcome for the value-added program within Rancho Cielo Youth Campus.

The second component of this evaluation was done with current students of the Value-added program within Rancho Cielo. This program is to be completed within a ten-month time frame according to the program model/ implementation. Alongside students receive supportive services to facilitate the completion of the program, the services include mental health services, drug & alcohol counseling amongst one on one help with tutors/ class aids. The evaluation has documented the experiences students have encountered while enrolled, and what areas of improvement need to be addressed for this specific program.

The evaluation looked at all the factors that make up the program assessing what aspects of the implementation have worked as expected by the program plan. As well as documented the successes encountered in regard to the programs model since the program's inauguration, and the input of students/alumni. The primary purpose of this project was to analyze the extent to which the program has been implemented as expected as stated in its original goals by using the input of administrative files, students, graduates and students who have dropped out. The agency hopes to learn which aspects of the program need to be implemented or renewed in the future implementation of the value-added program. In specific it will address the problems of what services and resources are helpful to the students and which are not helpful at all, as well as the logistics of the initial program description. This will help identify the barriers both program and student face to have a successful outcome.

V. Project Implementation

The objectives of educational programs within Rancho Cielo share an ultimate goal, which is to have students graduate with a high school diploma and become competent members of society. While enhancing academic and labor skills with various support services.

Table 1. Project type, purpose/outcomes, and implementation methods	
Project Name	Evaluation of Rancho Cielo's Value-Added Program
Purpose of Project	Assess program effectiveness and implementation
Implementation methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data collection (administrative files)• Data analysis• Program description (Development of logic model)• Participant identification (Students, staff)• Participant interviews.• Identify barriers and successes• Document final outcomes

As presented in Table 1, participants in this capstone project included program staff members. These participants provided the desired information regarding program implementations. The program's evaluation was done individually, access to information has been given to Julia Guzman field mentor and Value-Added Program Coordinator. The purpose of the evaluation is to properly identify areas of improvements, concerns and improvements the program could take initiative in.

The program evaluation required some aid from the existing resources within the program. To efficiently conduct this evaluation, we have utilized the information such as administrative files, student contact information, initial program model/ description. The challenges this evaluation has faced are drop-out and graduate students' participation. Encountering this challenge has changed the evaluation to only assessing students who were enrolled and staff members. The only staff contributing to the survey are teachers and support services staff (counselors). Therefore, the information has been utilized to improve experience for potential students and the students enrolled.

The first step to implementing this project was creating a logic model for the Value Added Program. A Logic model essential is a graphic map that demonstrates the relationship between resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the program (CDC,2018). To begin the creation of the logic model, a meeting with the value added program coordinator and other program coordinators was facilitated to obtain information on their logic model. As Well to have a concise idea of whom the resources of the program were and to establish the initial and long term goals of this specific program. Once having access to the information the creation of the logic model began and was completed. Upon completion the final product was presented to the Field mentor who is also the program coordinator.

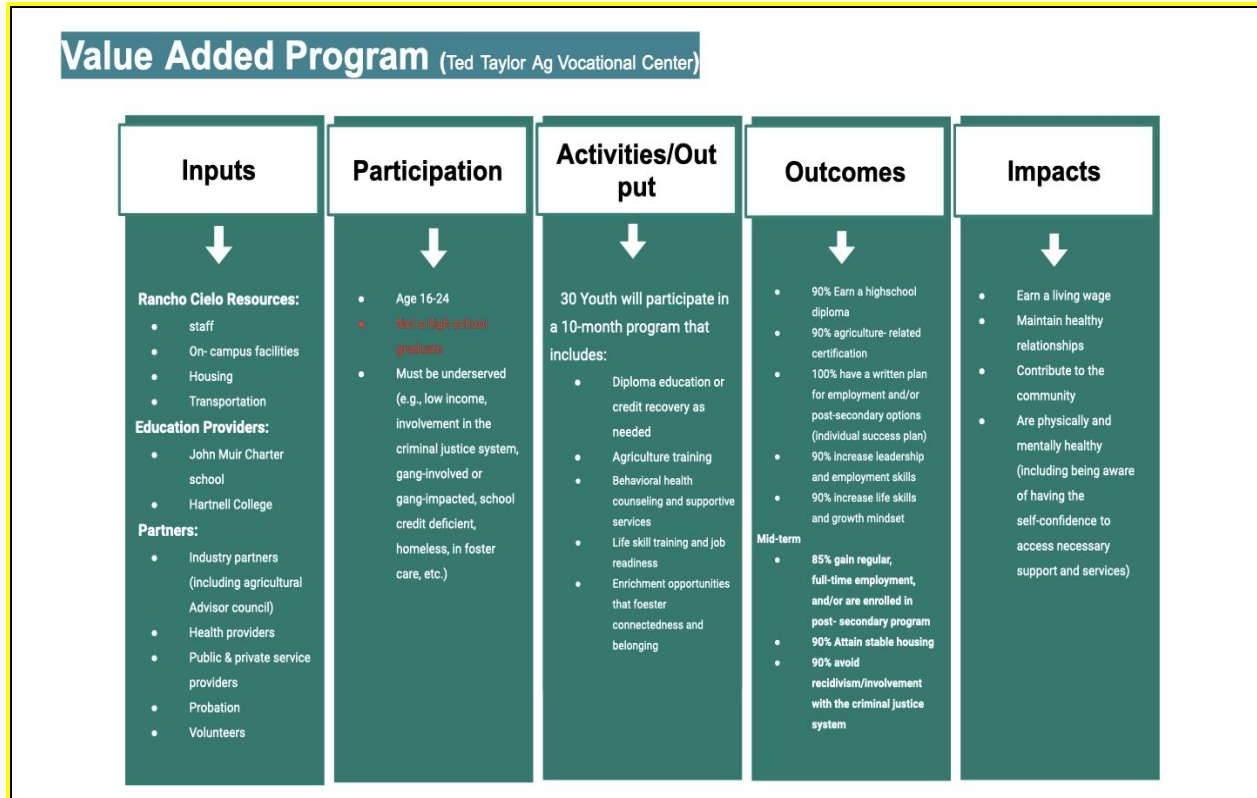
The final implementation for this project was upon approval of the logic model, a couple of students and staff would participate in a small survey. The survey consisted of personal input as to what the program has done effectively and what areas of improvement are needed. This information was then analyzed and presented to the program coordinator who pointed out the

areas that can and should be improved to make the programs experience effective. A detailed scope of work and timeline for the implementation is included in the Appendix section.

Evaluation Findings:

The logic model developed as part of the evaluation is presented in figure 2. For the creation of the logic model, most of the acquired information came from logic models provided by other programs within the agency. This allowed the evaluation to become more effective being that there were set implementations to the program. When analyzing the data from the program's logic model with data from the program's administrative files it was clear that some implementations were not being successful.

Figure 2: Logic Model



The program states to be a 10-month long program with completion of a diploma, agricultural training, amongst other academic and workforce achievements. Program coordinators became aware that the time completion of the program was not applicable for all the students. This was discovered after viewing students' school credits, which determine how long a student must remain in the program to receive a high school diploma. The implemented time of the program can be misleading and discouraging to those students who are eager to complete the program.

When students come to the agency they come from various educational backgrounds. Some students have some high school credit while others have none, therefore the completion of the 10-month program might be unachievable for some of the students. When looking at student files we came across a student's file who had joined the program as a senior, who was looking forward to the completion of the program within the next ten months. Due to low academic credit this accomplishment would take longer than the ten-month period. Even if this were to be achievable it would leave out other program implementations such as agricultural training, amongst life skills training and job readiness.

When speaking to two other students with the same situation they mentioned that learning that the program would take more than ten months was a bit discouraging and felt the original information they received was misleading. Being that various students are in the same circumstances it makes graduation and completion of the program difficult to achieve. Although there have been situations in which students complete the program but just attain a high school diploma - leaving out the agricultural training, life skills training and job readiness.

VI. Reflection of COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Agency and Population Served

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Rancho Cielo Youth Campus had to be shut down under regulations of Monterey County for the safety of students and personnel. This forced the agency to provide less services, by shutting down all programs and additional services such as Value added programs. As of now the only operating service within the agency is transitional housing. Transitional housing services are provided within the agency allowing the clients to reside in the housing area. The agency has turned to a virtual setting in terms of academic, and telephone behavioral health services. Rancho cielo has been providing students and family with weekly food care packages.

Being that Rancho Cielo Youth Campus and the Value added program are shut down it has had a great impact on the population they serve. The population served are underserved and disconnected youth, with that being it has left clients/ students without a safe place and supportive services. Students who acquired behavioral health services are no longer receiving them face to face and rather via telephone. This alternative is affective but has also diminished the use of this particular service. As well, clients under the Value Added program are not receiving the necessary skills training, and agricultural training to be able to complete the program. This situation puts clients at disadvantage elongating the program completion for all clients whether they are upon or far from completion.

With recidivism rates for at-risk-youth being far too high, the outbreak of this pandemic leaves an open space for the rates to keep spiking up. The pandemic has put millions of children and youth out of school and in this case out of prevention/ intervention programs. This allows

teens to become vulnerable to fall back into old habits or begin a new pattern of problematic engagements. The pandemic has left the at-risk youth without supportive services of which they attended to seek a promising future and refrain from harming activities. For instance, if clients live in an area known to gang violence they are being exposed to this environment allowing them to potentially fall back into gang involvement amongst other pertaining habits. The pandemic will increase the intake rates for the agency allowing them to expand their services to the at-risk youth. Also, the agency will have to reconstruct their clients behavioral and academic performance once services are available. As a result of the pandemic and in regard to future operation the agency will engage on online courses that fulfill all program components and provide additional services via virtual or over the phone meeting and conversations.

VII. Recommendations

Recommendations for the agency

The evaluation of Rancho Cielo's Value added program gave the program a logic model that only pertains to them, as well as identifying areas of success and improvement. The implementation methods should remain as set being that these focus on one long term impact.

With the project the agency has been able to identify that the completion time of the program can be unachievable being that each client has different educational levels when they enter.

Therefore, they plan on eliminating the program's time of completion being that some clients are required to stay longer than others. As well the project has identified that not all graduated students have completed certain activities/ requirements pertaining to the program's activities for completion. The following are the activities lacking completion Agricultural training, life skills

training, this has to do with students only completing academic courses and not completing hands on training. The Value Added program should create an individual completion plan for each student, as well as incorporate all training and hands on skill to the graduation and completion of the program. Future colleagues could focus on creating a capstone project that looks at the implementation of all programs with academic courses. This will allow students to obtain all the skills, training and job readiness upon the program completion.

The evaluation on the Value added program relates to at-risk youth recidivism rates being too high, due to the population they serve and the agency's goal. The agency and program serve the underserved and disconnected youth of Monterey County, aiming to shape their clients into competent members of society refraining them from the criminal justice system. This evaluation has allowed the agency to identify areas of improvement within program implementations that will allow students/clients to engage in all life and job readiness skills upon completion.

Allowing the agency to better deliver these services and create mass impact on clients and stray them from criminal justice activities by providing job readiness skills. The agency aims to make the clients competent citizens of society, and the starting point for this change is attained through the programs and services offered at Rancho Cielo Youth Campus.

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APPENDIX

Logic model -graphic depiction (road map) that presents the shared relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact for your program. It depicts the relationship between your program's activities and its intended effects. (cdc,2018)

Recidivism- the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend

Underserved- In regard to health services, refers to populations which are disadvantaged because of ability to pay, ability to access care, ability to access comprehensive healthcare, or other disparities for reasons of race, religion, language group or social status.

Table 1. Scope of Work			
Title: Rancho Cielo Value Added Program Evaluation			
Project description: Program evaluation			
Goal: evaluate Rancho Cielo's Value-Added Program			
Primary objective of the project: Asses the program effectiveness and implementation			
Activities		Deliverables	Timeline/deadlines
1	Discuss capstone project ideas with mentor	Final capstone project idea approved	Oct- Nov. 2019
2	Research Value-Added Program	Have a concise understanding and purpose of the program.	Nov. 2019
3	Identify participants	Establish relationship within the organization	Dec. 2019- Jan. 2020
4	Obtain data/ information from administrative files	Analyze cumulative data,logic models	January 28th 2020

5	Analyze data collected	Submit into database	Feb 27 th 2020
6	Create program logic model	Submit to mentor for approval	March 13,2020
7	Deliver information/data	Present findings to program coordinator/ mentor	March 18 , 2020
8	Implement survey with current participants	Results from pre & post survey	April - May 2020
9	Complete reporting requirements	Final agency and capstone reports	May 8th 2020
10	Prepare capstone presentation in selected format	Present at Dress Rehearsal for grading (posters submitted)	May 2020
11	Final preparation for Capstone Festival	Final presentation at Capstone Festival!!	May 15th 2020

Value Added Program (Ted Taylor Ag Vocational Center)

